

# FRONT RANGE

## Panel paints bullseye on Endangered Species Act

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GREELEY — The Endangered Species Act would work better if it gave private landowners more incentives and tried harder to keep species off the list to begin with, a like-minded panel told Rep. Marilyn Musgrave at a hearing Monday.

As it is, landowners fear the Endangered Species Act, or ESA, so much that if they find such species, they're more likely to destroy them than report them to a government agency, said Jim Sims, executive director of Partnership of the West, an advocate for business, oil and gas and timber industries.

"What most people do is shoot, shovel and shut up," Sims said. "Most people hope they don't find these birds, be-

cause they won't be there the next day."

The hearing, hosted by Rep. Musgrave, R-Fort Morgan, and Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Okla., looked at the ESA's impact on agriculture and producers. Sims joined representatives from the Colorado Farm Bureau, Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Colorado Division of Natural Resources and the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory on the five-member panel.

Sims argued the 30-year-old ESA



Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Fort Morgan, co-hosted a hearing Monday that discussed the effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act.

doesn't work because it doesn't help species recover once they're put on the list. Sims used U.S. Fish and Wildlife statistics to argue that the ESA has not been responsible for the recovery of one of the 1,300-plus plant and animal species listed as threatened or endangered.

Some environmentalists agree with that but say the ESA has succeeded because it prevents listed species from extinction, something Sims acknowledged at the hearing.

"The fact that we're not recovering them is not failure," said Jacob Smith, executive director of the Center for Native Ecosystems. "We know that when you list a species, the chance of extinction goes down a lot. The act is the safety net."

Colorado Division of Natural Resources Director Russell George

said states need more government funding to implement that safety net, and that recovery goals for species should be clear when they're listed, something he argued isn't done now.

"If there's enough science to say a species requires listing, there's enough to know ... when we've recovered a species," George said.

Panel members said landowners, especially farmers and ranchers, should have incentives to protect species on their property.

"Desired behavior is always more apt to be achieved by providing a carrot rather than a stick," said Alan Foutz, president of the Colorado Farm Bureau. "As it currently stands, there is no carrot in the Endangered Species Act."

But there's also not enough funding

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to help the ESA work, said Lauren McCain, desert and grassland coordinator of Forest Guardians, a New Mexico-based group with a Denver office.

"It's chronic underfunding," McCain said. "We need a fully implemented, fully funded Endangered Species Act. Ag producers are going through rough times. It's easy to lash out at the Endangered Species Act."